DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 238 285 FL 014 150

AUTHOR Reschke, Claus
TITLE Proficiency-Based Foreign Language Teacher Certification: The Texas Project.
PUB DATE Dec 83
NOTE 18p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Modern Language Association (100th, New York, NY, December 27-30, 1983).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Competency Based Teacher Education; Federal Aid; French; German; Higher Education; Interviews; *Language Teachers; Policy Formation; Program Descriptions; Public Policy; Questioning Techniques; Secondary School Teachers; *Second Language Instruction; Spanish; State Standards; Statewide Planning; *Teacher Certification; *Teacher Evaluation
IDENTIFIERS American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Langs; *Oral Proficiency Testing; *Texas

ABSTRACT

A federally-funded three-year project is described that was undertaken by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages to train a group of Texas-based college level foreign language educators in French, German, and Spanish to serve as oral proficiency interviewers and evaluators of all applicants for a Texas state teaching certificate in foreign language education beginning in 1986. The project came about as the state was redefining the desired secondary school proficiency levels in 12 curriculum areas and mandating a field-specific proficiency-based exit examination for teacher education programs in the state. The four primary goals of the project are to: (1) familiarize foreign language teachers and students with the upcoming state-mandated changes in certification and in graduation requirements for both teachers and high school students; (2) train adequate numbers of oral proficiency interviewers in the three languages; (3) pilot test, with volunteers, entering and graduating teacher education majors in the three languages to establish their oral proficiency levels; and (4) provide legislators and other state officials with information on which to base state standards. (MSE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED238285

PROFICIENCY-BASED FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHER CERTIFICATION: THE TEXAS PROJECT.

Claus Reschke
December 1983

During the next twenty minutes I would like to answer four questions.

These are:

1. What is the Texas Project?
2. How did the Texas Project come about?
3. What are the goals of the Texas Project?
4. Where does the Texas Project stand at this time?

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

CLAUS RESCHKE

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

"The Texas Project" was given its name by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) in its application for a three-year grant from the U.S. Department of Education. Specifically, the project's primary focus is to train, over a three-year period, a cadre of Texas-based foreign language educators at the college level who teach French, German, or Spanish, so they may serve as oral proficiency interviewers and evaluators of all applicants for a State of Texas Teaching Certificate in foreign languages. Beginning in May 1986, all applicants for such a teaching certificate must meet specific -- but not yet clearly defined -- teaching-field proficiency requirements, as mandated by state law.

Training these interviewers/evaluators is no mean task, considering the geographic dimensions of Texas: 267,339 square miles. That large an area could accommodate comfortably, for example, all four German-speaking countries (the Federal Republic of Germany, the German Democratic Republic, Austria, and Switzerland), with enough space left over to include the states of Nebraska, Delaware, and Rhode Island.

The three-year grant from the U.S. Department of Education was awarded to ACTFL earlier this year. Since the starting date for the grant was

FL 014 150

September 1, 1983, we are at present just in the beginning phase of the grant period.

How did the Texas Project come about? This question requires a two-pronged answer.

In 1981, after about six years of turmoil in U.S. education during which, nationwide, curricula in secondary schools -- and in colleges, too --had been "enhanced" with about everything imaginable, from bird watching and bird nesting to crocheting and drug education, the Texas legislature, prompted by various citizen groups, told the State Board of Education and, indirectly, its policing arm, the Texas Education Agency (TEA), that "enough is enough". People both in and out of education had approached the legislature on the subject of pruning an overgrown curriculum that contained more desserts than basic intellectual fare. They wanted to start anew, wanted to wipe the slate clean of all those nonessential courses that, in their opinion, had needlessly been added to the curriculum. They asked the lawmakers to tell them what, minimally, a basic, standard, state-wide curriculum should look like.

The legislators accepted the task. They proceeded to identify twelve curricular areas that must be taught to students in every school district in the state. For the first time in Texas' educational history, foreign languages were included among these twelve curricular areas, although with the added proviso "to the extent possible".

The legislature then asked the State Board of Education to define what the essential elements of a K-12 curriculum should be in each of

the twelve curricular areas. This task was assigned to the Texas Education Agency. In the course of its work this group, assisted by many foreign language experts in the state, drafted a three-level, proficiency-based foreign language curriculum that, if it were to become law, must be offered in every school district throughout Texas. The recommendations contained in that draft, now an official state document, will go into effect in the schools, starting in the Fall of 1984.

Also in 1981, at the same time as the Texas legislature was tackling the secondary school curriculum, it passed what is known as "the transcipt law", which specifies that every student who graduates from a Texas high school shall receive a transcript, either "regular" or "advanced". Since the legislature did not define what either a regular or an advanced transcript is, the Texas Education Agency was given that task as well. The agency listened to all kinds of advice from various citizen and educational groups, including the Texas Senate Committee on Education headed by Texas billionaire H. Ross Perrot, which is currently studying a whole host of educational issues on which to make recommendations for action to the next legislature and the Governor. Finally, the TEA recommended to the State Board of Education that an advanced transcript require twenty-two credit units, including either three levels of a proficiency-based foreign language program or demonstration of foreign language proficiency.

The standards for what constitutes a minimal exit-level proficiency at Level III, along with the proficiency standards at the two lower levels, have been the subject of a series of meetings and proficiency-oriented

conferences conducted under the auspices of TEA. Foreign language educators from all levels and all areas of the state have been able to offer suggestions and to help write proficiency statements for each of the four language skills and for culture. The resulting document, of which oral foreign language proficiency is very much a part, is presently in semifinal draft form. The standards developed use as their basis the ACTFL/ETS provisional foreign language proficiency descriptions, but they have not yet been cast in concrete.

During 1984, the State Board of Education will decide exactly how the various foreign language exit proficiencies are to be determined and what standards are to be used.

So much for the first set of answers to the question, "How did the Texas Project come about?" These answers have been concerned with the proficiencies of high school students who choose an advanced transcript which, presumably, will be required of them for college entrance. However, the Texas legislature has also been active on another front -- teacher education.

Back in 1979, when the proficiency issue began gaining momentum throughout the U.S., members of the legislature reasoned that students generally do not advance beyond the level of their teachers. This is especially true for skill-development courses -- and foreign languages are primarily skills at the lower levels, no matter how intellectually beneficial they may be at an advanced level. Accordingly, the legislature created a Commission on Standards for the Teaching Profession composed of sixteen members, among them representatives from schools and colleges.

The legislature instructed the Commission to take a hard look at all aspects of the teacher education programs in Texas and to describe the core of teacher-education programs that must be part of the program in each of the twelve teaching areas at each institution. We have 47 institutions in the state that offer teacher education. They graduate about 220 newly certified foreign language teachers each year, although the total number of graduates in foreign languages each year is much higher. Only fifteen of these institutions account for about 90% of the graduating teachers.

Another step the Texas legislature took was to mandate that every student entering a teacher-education program in Texas must, after May 1984, take a basic-skills examination, generally at the end of the sophomore year, to evaluate the student's proficiency in reading, writing, and computation. Pilot tests have already been conducted. Based on their results, it has been estimated that, as of 1983, 70% of the Anglo, 16% of the Black, and 35% of the Hispanic applicants for admission to a teacher-education program in Texas will pass the basic-skills test. And what about the others who do not? --- In view of the existing teacher shortage in many subject areas throughout Texas, the results of the pilot testing program and the projections stemming from it are, at best, a bit scary.

In addition to the basic skills test, for beginning teacher-education majors, the Texas legislature also mandated a field-specific, proficiency-based exit test, which is to be administered to every graduate from a Texas teacher-education program. The language of the mandate is very specific: candidates must be tested in their chosen teaching field and

must demonstrate proficiency therein. They must also graduate from a teacher-education program that teaches them how to teach the applicable elements of the K-12 curriculum within the twelve curricular areas that the 1981 legislature mandated to be taught in every school district in the state.

For the foreign language curricula, the State Board of Education, through the Texas Education Agency, had to wrestle with the questions of how to administer this testing and what to test, to be sure that all areas of the candidates' foreign language proficiency would in fact be assessed. A third question, and not an unimportant one, also needed an answer: what minimal level of field-specific proficiencies must the applicant demonstrate to qualify him for a foreign language teaching certificate in the State of Texas, whether he be moving to Texas from another state, reeintering the job market, or just graduating from a teacher-education program in Texas.

A subcommittee of the Commission on Standards for the Teaching Profession has recently recommended to the Commission that the minimal proficiency standards for a Secondary Teaching Certificate in Foreign Languages in Texas be set at the "Advanced-Plus" level, for those of you familiar with the language-specific, provisional level descriptions of the ACTFL/ETS Proficiency Guidelines, or at the 2^{+} level on the FSI/ILR (Foreign Service Institute/Inter-Agency Language Roundtable) scale, for those more familiar with the U.S. Government's functional language proficiency rating system. The subcommittee recommended further that the minimal proficiency standard for a teaching certificate in foreign languages in elementary grades be set at the "Advanced" level of the ACTFL/ETS scale, or at Level 2 of the FSI/ILR scale.

We were fortunate in Texas that one of the members of the subcommittee that made these recommendations is Joan Manley, Professor of French at the University of Texas at El Paso, and one of the leading foreign language educators in the state. Joan also chairs the ten-member Academic Coordinating Committee, of which I am a member, whose task it is to coordinate and supervise all activities relating to the Texas Project.

Some time during 1984, the Commission on Standards for the Teaching Profession will give to the State Board of Education its final recommendations on what proficiencies shall be demonstrated in each teaching field and what the minimal standards for teacher certification shall be, effective in May 1986.

Now that we have traced the developments that led to Texas' involvement in the proficiency issue and proficiency testing, and which eventually resulted in the Texas Project, we can attempt to answer my third question: "What are the goals of the Texas Project?"

Essentially, these goals are four in number. The first one is informational: to familiarize foreign language teachers and students with the upcoming, state-mandated changes that will affect them -- changes in foreign language teacher certification, graduation requirements from teacher-education programs, and high school graduation requirements for those students who want to earn an advanced transcript and plan to enroll in college.

The second goal of the Texas Project is to train an adequate number of oral proficiency interviewers and evaluators in French, German, and

Spanish, the three languages on which the ACTFL grant focuses. The training must be done within the next three years so that trained people will be in place throughout the state, according to a sensible geographic distribution pattern based on area needs, before the state-mandated proficiency requirements for teacher certification become law in 1986.

The third goal of the Texas Project is to pilot-test, on a volunteer basis, entering and graduating teacher-education majors in French, German, and Spanish, to establish their oral proficiency level upon entry and exit from the teacher-education program. Pilot tests will begin in May 1984 and will be repeated at least once, probably twice each year.

The fourth goal of the Texas Project is to provide members of the state legislature, the State Board of Education, and the Commission on Standards for the Teaching Profession with factual, informed advice on which they can base their proficiency requirements -- due in 1984 -- for students receiving an advanced high school transcript or graduating from a foreign language teacher-education program in the state. In accomplishing this goal, the Texas Project hopes to demonstrate to these three groups the viability and workability of including a valid, reliable test of oral proficiency of high school students and future foreign language teachers in the "proficiency package", since we hope that oral skill will become one of the cornerstone proficiencies that, by 1986, a candidate must demonstrate to qualify for a foreign language teaching certificate in Texas.

Let me now comment about each of these four goals, and at the same

time answer my final question: "Where does the Texas Project stand at this time?"

The first, informational, goal of the Project has a barely disguised hidden agenda: to make it known throughout Texas among the foreign language teaching profession, the foreign language teacher-education profession, and the members of the various state boards, commissions, and committees on education that we, the foreign language teachers in the state, welcome demonstrated, functional proficiency as a primary criterion for teacher certification. Furthermore, we support placing special emphasis on a minimal, functional oral proficiency requirement for certification, because it makes sense.

In pursuit of this goal, a number of us involved in the Texas Project -- a number that is growing steadily each week -- are willing to go anywhere in the state, talk to any group of students, teachers, parents, school administrators, counselors, advisors, state legislators, and other state officials, even at our own expense, to make sure that all these groups clearly understand that it is functional proficiency we are talking about, not a number of courses finished with a particular GPA, and that all future foreign language teachers in Texas must be able to demonstrate that they are actually able to function in the foreign language they teach.

Please allow me for a moment a minor, but perhaps an interesting, digression. As part of the various ACTFL Proficiency Task Force projects, the Texas Education Agency, on behalf of the Southwest Conference, recently conducted a nationwide survey on the testing of prospective teachers for initial state certification. As the dark shaded area of the map show (Fig. 1), only ten of the fifty states require prospective teachers to

take an examination in their specific teaching field(s) before they become certified. These states are: Alabama, Arkansas, California, Georgia, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. It is interesting to note in passing that most of these states are located in the South. Four other states (grey shaded areas), Connecticut, Kentucky, Texas, and West Virginia, have state mandates to test in the near future in the specific teaching field(s) for which certification is being requested.

Of course, this type of survey, which was conducted by TEA four months ago, is nothing new. It merely provides us with the most recent information on the subject. In this context, it is interesting that only two of the fifty states surveyed, Georgia and Massachusetts, require prospective foreign language teachers to demonstrate <u>oral</u> proficiency in the language for which they seek certification. Thus our "push" in Texas to emphasize minimal functional standards of oral proficiency for all future foreign language teachers and to establish, with the help of ACTFL, a workable system of administering a valid, reliable oral proficiency test seems to meet a need that goes far beyond Texas' borders, a need that is nation-wide. We are not naive enough to believe that any legislation can be replicated from one state to another. We know that we, legislatively and professionally, can only serve as a model for other states and professional groups to follow in designing their own legislation and establishing their own teacher-certification requirements, based on their own needs and special circumstances.

That brings me back to Texas and the second goal of our Project: to train an adequate number of oral proficiency interviewers and evaluators

in French, German, and Spanish within the next three years and to have them, at the end of that period, in place throughout the state.

On January 18, 1984 -- that is three weeks from today -- twenty-four college foreign language teachers of French, German, and Spanish will meet in Austin, Texas, to participate in the first Oral Proficiency Training Workshop to be conducted in Texas under the U.S. Department of Education's Texas Project grant. Ten days ago, the Academic Coordinating Committee met in Austin to select the participants from a large pool of applicants: six college teachers of French, five of German, and thirteen of Spanish. During the five-day workshop, they will learn how to conduct and evaluate an oral proficiency interview according to the criteria developed by ACTFL, ETS, and the ILR. Upon completion of that workshop, the participants will go home and conduct ten taped 15-to-20-minute interviews, using high school and college students as subjects, to practice their newly acquired skills. They will then rate these taped interviews and mail them with their rating to an experienced interviewer-evaluator for analysis and constructive criticism. Later, after the trainee has received and studied the trainer's comments on his first batch of interviews, each workshop participant will produce a set of fifteen additional taped interviews. These, again, will be evaluated and constructively criticized by the expert.

All of this activity must take place before April 20, 1984, when the workshop participants return to Austin for a two-day follow-up workshop to evaluate and discuss any remaining difficulties with the interviewing techniques or the rating process, to consider the potential curricular implications of the project, and to familiarize themselves with the

logistics of the graduating T.E. major testing program that will start, on a voluntary basis, the following month, in May. This series of workshops will be repeated at least once more before 1986, doubling the number of trained oral proficiency interviewers and evaluators available within the state for each of the three languages.

Some of you who are familiar with the enormous size of our state may wonder how the Academic Coordinating Committee proposes to deal with the logistics of this enterprise, and how we propose to have qualified interviewers-evaluators available where they are needed, geographically speaking. That was indeed one of the committee's major concerns. However, under Joan Manley's able leadership and with the help of our colleagues at the Texas Education Agency, we came up with what we believe is a workable solution. Because of the sheer size of our state, there already exist twenty Regional Education Service Centers, sprinkled throughout the state to serve each area's needs. (Fig. 2) They were established years ago and are fully operational. We hope to make good use of them in the Texas Project. On the next map (Fig. 3) you can see that we have divided the state into six large areas, each encompassing several Regional Education Service Centers. We propose to operate a testing site at a Service Center in each of the six geographic areas. The six testing sites currently proposed would be located in the Regional Education Service Centers in Edinburg (Area I), Austin (Area II), Houston (Area III), Dallas (Area IV), Lubbock (Area V), and El Paso (Area VI).

In drawing the bounderies for the six major testing areas in the state and deciding on the location for the testing site in each area, we have been guided by the location of the fifteen universities with the

large teacher-education programs from which nearly 90% of the graduates in foreign language education come, and by the proximity of these institutions to the proposed testing sites. In selecting the twenty-four participants in next month's oral proficiency workshop, we have been guided by the number of French, German, and Spanish teachers who, upon graduation from a teacher-education program, applied for their initial teaching certificate during the past few years in each of the six areas; by the specific language-teacher needs of the area; and by the presence of already trained oral proficiency interviewers-evaluators in each language in that area. For example, in Area I, located in the most southern part of the state, there exists hardly any need for oral proficiency interviewer-evaloators in French and German. Spanish is the primary language taught and spoken there, so three of the thirteen available slots for Spanish went to applicants from Area I. We applied the same criteria to the needs of, and applications from, the other areas and languages.

By the time field-specific proficiency testing becomes law in Texas three years from now, we hope to have an adequate number of trained oral proficiency interviewer-evaluators for each language in each of the six geographic areas. They will be qualified, first of all, to conduct interviews at least twice a year (Spring and Fall) at the testing site for all who seek a Texas teaching certificate in French, German, or Spanish. We also expect them to continue the oral proficiency testing of students beginning their teacher-education program in these three languages, to determine not only the students' entry-level oral proficiency, but also to assist them and their advisors to make intelligent choices, so that, during the teacher-education program, the student can prepare

himself to meet the minimum requirement of functional foreign language proficiency mandated by the state for a teaching certificate.

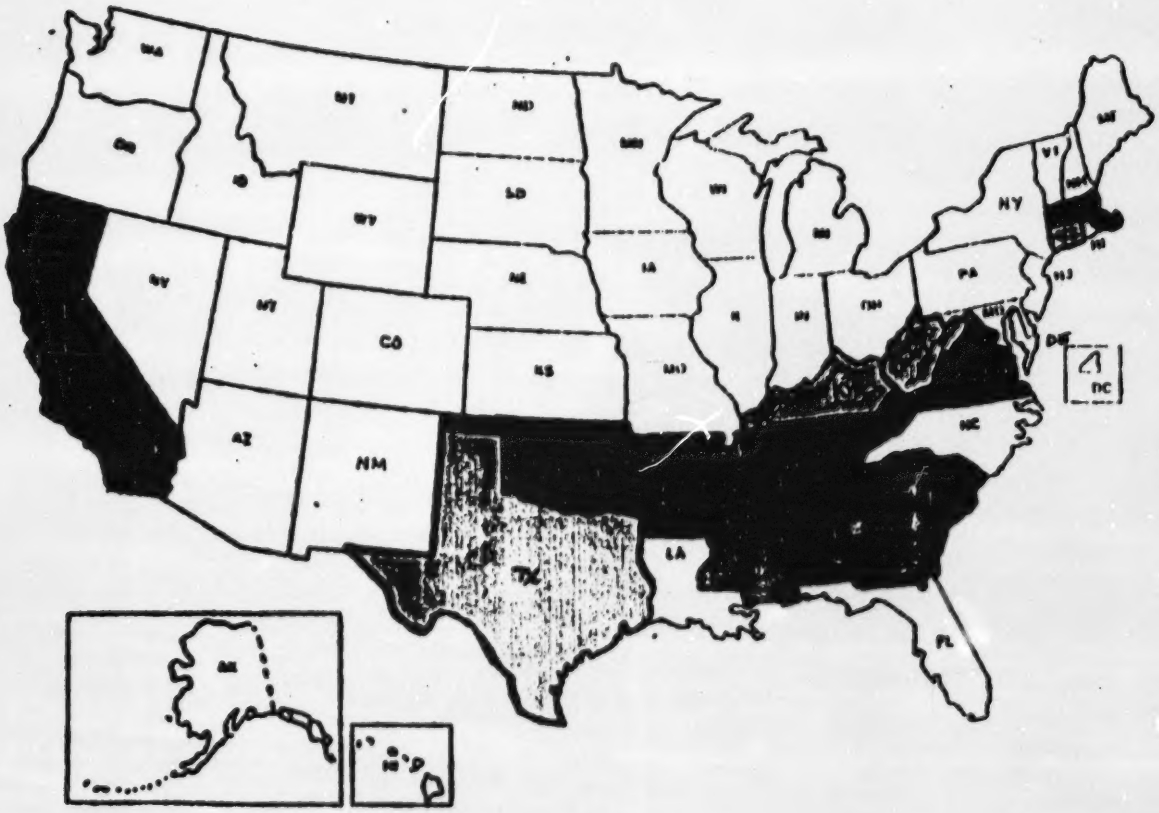
At the moment, we are still in the first half of the first year of our three-year project. We have time to convince our colleagues teaching foreign languages in Texas high schools that the requirement of demonstrated functional foreign language oral proficiency, along with other proficiencies, for teacher certification purposes makes sense; to convince the Texas legislators and the State Board of Education that it is feasible to create and maintain an adequate, properly trained group of oral proficiency interviewers and evaluators, located where they are needed; and to convince our colleagues in teacher education that their curriculum must incorporate adequate opportunities for foreign language teacher-education majors to develop the skill level in oral proficiency required for certification.

The response to our various public relations efforts has been very positive from all quarters. Interest in the topic of proficiency standards and proficiency testing for students and future teachers alike runs high in the state. I have no doubt that, with the Texas Project, we shall succeed in making foreign language teacher certification in Texas proficiency-based, with special emphasis on demonstrated, functional oral proficiency.

MLA, New York
December 1983

Claus Reschke
University of Houston

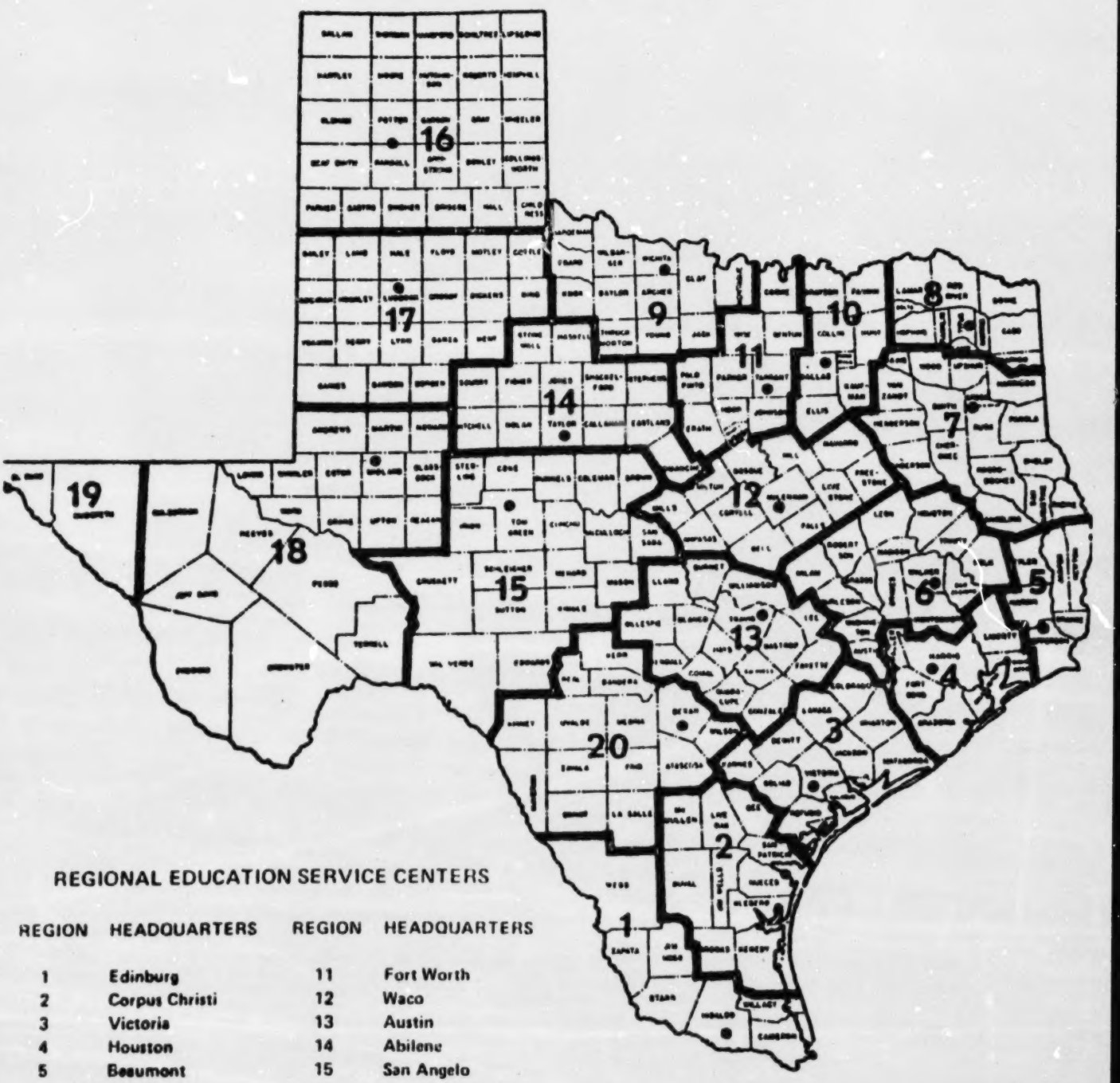
STATE TESTING REQUIREMENTS IN SPECIFIC TEACHING FIELD(S) FOR CERTIFICATION



States presently requiring a test in the specific teaching field(s) for certification

States mandated to test in the specific teaching field(s) for certification in the near future

Figure 1



REGIONAL EDUCATION SERVICE CENTERS

REGION	HEADQUARTERS	REGION	HEADQUARTERS
1	Edinburg	11	Fort Worth
2	Corpus Christi	12	Waco
3	Victoria	13	Austin
4	Houston	14	Abilene
5	Beaumont	15	San Angelo
6	Huntsville	16	Amarillo
7	Kilgore	17	Lubbock
8	Mount Pleasant	18	Midland
9	Wichita Falls	19	El Paso
10	Richardson	20	San Antonio

Figure 2

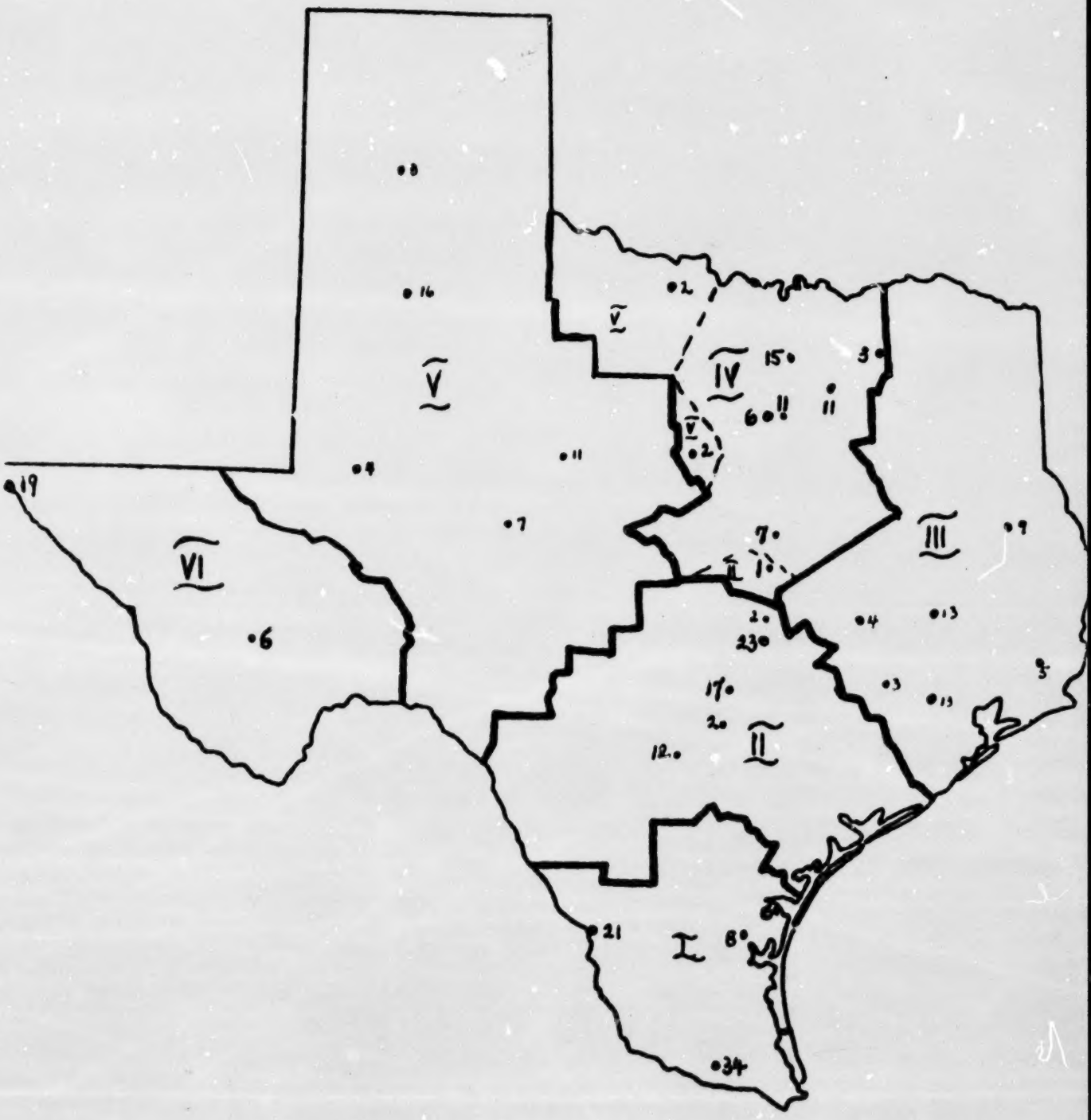

V
IV
III
II
I
VI
V
8
16
4
11
7
19
6
2
15
3
11
6
11
2
7
9
13
4
23
2
17
20
12
3
13
3
21
8
34

Figure 3